remuneration and pitiable conditions of contract labour are dealt with and appropriate action taken under the provisions of the Act and the rules.

The Act does not provide for absorption of such labour on regular basis. In the aftermath of the judgement of the Supreme Court in Air India Statutory Corporations and Others Vs. United Labour Union and Others, however, the establishments engaging contract labour are under statutory obligation to absorb contract labourers on regular basis wherever the "appropriate Government' by way of notification under section 10 of the Contract Labour (Regulation and abolition) Act, 1970 have prohibited employment of contract labour in any job/work/ process in the establishment. The criteria to be adopted for absorption of such contract labour on regular basis as per the judgement will be the duration of work, number of employees working on the job etc. In case of retrenchment due to excess staff, the principle of "last come, first go' will be applied subject to reappointment as and when vacancy arises.

The judgement of Hon' ble Supreme Court dated 6.12.96 in the case of Air India Statutory Corporations and Others Vs. United Labour Union and Others is the established law under Article 141 of the Constitution. It was published in 1997 LLR 288 and AIR 1997 SC 645. The implications of the judgement were examined in consultation with the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs and directions were issued to the emforcement agency of the Ministry of Labour to strictly implement the judgement in its letter and spirit.

Heavy Workload on Indian Missions in Arabian Countries

*465. SHRI M.J. VARKEY MATTATHIL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the workload on Indian Missions in Arabian Gulf has increased minifold;

(b) if so, whether Government proposed to strengthen these missions with sufficient staff and other facilities; and

(c) whether Government propose to open and additional consulate in Damman considering the heavy workload in the Indian embassy at Riyadh and consular office at Jeddah?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (b) Workload on our missions in the Gulf has increased over the years commensurate with increase in the strength of the Indian community working there, enhancement of bilateral trade, services and a greater measure of political contacts.

Staff strength in all our Missions abroad remains under contant review; it is evaluated professionally.

(c) The Government of Saudi Arabia has not yet consented to be opening of our Consulate in Dammam. However, our Mission in Riyadh sends consular teams, every week to Dammam to provide passport and other consular services to the Indian community in the area.

Negative Growth Rate of Agricultural Production

*468. SHRI PREM CHAND: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that food production for 1999-2000 is expected to decline from 203.04 Million Ton in 1998-99 to 199.06 Million Ton in 1999-2000;

(b) whether the area under cultivation has reduced from 125.36 hectares to 123.31 hectares;

(c) whether the yield per hectare is expected to drop from 1620 to 1615; and

(d) if so, what steps Government have taken to ensure a positive growth rate during this financial year?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SUNDAR LAL PATWA): (a) to (c) The area, production and yield of foodgrains during 1998-1999 vis-avis 1999-2000 is given in the following table: